



THE U.S. SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION PLAN COUNCIL WORKSHOP/MEETING MINUTES AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

22–25 March 2004

U.S. Geological Survey Fort Collins Science Center
Fort Collins, Colorado

The three-day meeting included three main elements: 1) a workshop on setting population and habitat objectives, 2) a workshop on regional assessments for monitoring temperate migrants, and 3) a meeting of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council (Council). Thanks to Susan Skagen, Juliette Wilson, and staff at the Fort Collins Science Center for providing excellent meeting space and hospitality. Discussion topics and action items are presented below.

Objective-setting Workshop

The purpose of this workshop was to review and recommend approaches for development of population and habitat objectives for shorebirds. Background presentations were made on the value of abundance measures versus performance indicators, the energetic approach for passage birds, and the results of the Partners in Flight long-billed curlew exercise. A general approach was suggested and discussion focused on identification of area-species-season priorities that were derived from considerations of bottlenecks for population growth or maintenance. Causes of bottlenecks might not be limited to changes in vegetation land cover. Derivation of priority groups should also consider the ability to undertake management or conservation actions that can improve the conditions of shorebird populations. For example, the greatest limiting factor to shorebird populations that use the Prairie Potholes is suggested to be high-quality breeding habitat, whereas shorebirds in California's Central Valley might be most limited by the availability of wintering habitat. High priority taxa should be assessed to determine if providing habitat to entire suites, of passage birds for example, will meet their environmental requirements or taxa-specific objectives are needed. For example, Hudsonian godwits and short-billed dowitchers might have different habitat requirements than other mid-continent migrants. Clearly, more work is needed to develop a process to determine conservation targets for shorebirds. The group agreed that an initial emphasis on creating environmental conditions that provide stable populations of shorebirds should be the immediate, general goal. If specific objectives are developed, they could be incorporated into State Comprehensive Wildlife Plans, Joint Ventures, and The Nature Conservancy's Ecoregional Planning. The following committee was suggested to draft objective-setting recommendations: Catherine Hickey, Suzanne Fellows, Stephen Brown/Brian Harrington, Bob Russell, Randy Wilson, Jon Bart, Sue Thomas, Tim Jones, Neal Niemuth, Garry Donaldson, Brad Andres.

Action: Develop broad recommendations for a process to develop shorebird conservation targets (Objective Committee by 31 July 2004)

Action: Continue partitioning of shorebird species into flyway populations. Further partition flyway populations into BCR-scale units. Partition flyway populations with review by regional contacts and objective-setting committee by 31 July 2004 (Andres).

Action: Apply general approach to examples of long-billed curlew (refine PIF work), American oystercatcher, and Playa Lakes Joint Venture efforts for passage birds.

Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring

The summary below includes notes taken at the Fort Collins meeting and a report submitted by Jon Bart.

Workshop on Regional Assessments for Monitoring Temperate Migrant Shorebirds

The purpose of this workshop was to review progress made on regional assessments under the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM) and recommend actions needed for further development. Reviews of work completed or on-going in the Great Basin, Atlantic coast, Prairie Potholes, and Great Lakes were presented. Jon Bart also discussed the Coordinated Bird Monitoring effort and the relationship with PRISM. Stephen Brown presented results of the wintering survey for American Oystercatchers conducted along the southeastern Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts. From this survey, the U.S. American Oystercatcher population consists of $10,971 \pm 298$ (1 SE) individuals.

We reviewed the objectives of conducting regional assessments and agreed on five main objectives: 1) inventory sites for an indication of shorebird use, 2) quantify magnitude of site use and track temporal changes in site use, 3) evaluate shorebird response to management actions, 4) provide indication of change in shorebird population size, and 5) provide opportunity for public participation and awareness. These objectives are scale-dependent and vary from site to landscape to flyway. Biases previously outlined in the PRISM document (measurement, selection, and frame) correspond to these various scales. Thus, shorebird biologists most interested in the site scale issues should be primarily concerned with measurement error, and through time, bias. Large changes in measurement error will hinder accurate evaluation of site use and response to management actions. For example, vegetation growth within an impoundment may alter the detectability of the number of shorebirds counted in the impoundment despite no change in the actual number present. If the surveyed area changes dramatically among years, the area should be randomly sub-sampled and an accurate count of shorebirds in the sub-sample could be used to estimate the total number present in the entire sample area. More attention should be paid to assessing the potential for measurement error and bias when preparing regional assessments.

One of the main points of confusion in preparing regional assessments has been the definition of a “site”. In general, landscapes can be divided into two major groups based on the relationship between wetland elements and the surrounding landscape matrix—large discrete wetlands and small dispersed wetlands. Sampling methods in a given area will depend on the distribution of

these two wetland landscapes. Regardless of the wetland landscape group, shorebird habitat Types 1, 2, and 3 should be identified as described in the PRISM document. Large sites could be divided to accommodate survey coverage by a single volunteer observer during a single day. Identifying the general shorebird wetland landscape configuration in each Bird Conservation Region would help outline the approach to a regional assessment. Immediate efforts, in most regions, should focus on site evaluations.

The group also discussed the need to increase outreach efforts for PRISM, particularly for the temperate regional assessments. There is a clear need to working more closely with the National Wildlife Refuge System and other partners that, as a start, include: Shorebird Management Listserv participants; USFWS-NCTC shorebird management course; National Audubon IBA State Coordinators and individual sites; state fish and wildlife agency directors, nongame biologists, and planners; appropriate USDA Forest Service stations and offices; and Joint Venture staff. The message should be a summary of the program and direct those interested in shorebird monitoring to more detailed information on the Shorebird Plan website. Sue Thomas had previously drafted a brochure on PRISM that, with some additions, might meet this purpose.

The proposal sent the U.S. Geological Survey's National Biological Information Infrastructure was accepted, and work will start in 2004 and continue into 2005. The objective was to make more shorebird count information available on the Internet. Funds this year will go to the Canadian Wildlife Service, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, and PRBO Conservation Science.

Action: Update regional assessment methods document to include status, projected timeline, and general approach for each BCR. Make available on the Shorebird Plan website by 31 May 2004 (Andres, Bart).

Action: Review PRISM brochure, suggest changes, further develop target audience list, and distribute by 31 July 2004 (Andres, Thomas).

Arctic surveys

Good progress has been made in the past year, though preparing an analysis of work to date and developing plans for future work has taken longer than expected. A final report will be done during the coming few weeks. We also need to prepare a report on work from last summer on methods for intensive plots. Both reports will then be peer-reviewed and used to obtain support in Alaska (support is already pretty much in hand for this work in Canada). Especially in Canada, we are committed to covering all species on the surveys and are working with representatives from the initiatives to design this aspect of the work.

Boreal Surveys

Pam Sinclair and colleagues have prepared the first draft of a report on how to undertake the boreal surveys. Also, the Western Boreal Initiative is gaining momentum in Canada and

promises to provide an excellent opportunity for shorebird surveys. Major progress in this area is expected over the coming 1-2 years.

Temperate Breeding Surveys

Stephanie Jones and Cheri Gratto-Trevor are planning a meeting either at the AOU or during the fall elsewhere to report on the LBCU project, make plans for future work on that effort, and to develop an action plan for some of the other species (e.g., Interior Snowy Plover). Bruce Peterjohn and Jon Bart are supposed to help plan for this meeting by doing a more thorough analysis of BBS data than we have in the past. Participants in on-going efforts for American Oystercatchers and Piping Plovers should be consulted about the feasibility of expanding efforts to other beach-residing shorebirds.

Surveys in Latin America

Not much tangible progress here yet but Garry Donaldson is working with Wetlands International and others to develop shorebird surveys. We expect more progress during the coming 1-2 years but it is hard to predict how rapidly this work will develop. Garry and Charles Duncan have been discussing expansion and merging of the Neotropical Waterbird Survey with the PRISM ideas with a few Latin American colleagues.

Research Working Group

Garry Donaldson presented a draft Terms of Reference for the formation of the Shorebird Research Group of the Americas (SRGA). The intent would be, at least initially, to include participants from Canada, Mexico, and the U.S.A. A meeting was held in February to discuss the general approach. Specific efforts that address species or topics, such as limiting factors, would be addressed as projects under the umbrella of the group. There were some questions raised by the Council on how projects will fit under the SRGA. The group would function similarly to the bi-national PRISM working group. Funding possibilities are being actively pursued in Canada. Stephen Brown was approved as U.S. co-chair of this forming group.

Action: Make revisions to the Terms of Reference and suggest SRGA Executive Committee members. Distribute to Council members for comments and approval by 31 May 2004 (Donaldson and Brown).

A research working group has recently been formed under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). The group has met once and has subsequently invited participation by each of the migratory bird initiatives. A greater need for emphasis on research in the bird conservation community has been added as part of the U.S. NABCI Committee's action items. A Terms of Reference, or other document describing the role of this group, is not yet available. The Council approved the nomination of Stephen Brown as the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan's (Shorebird Plan) representative on this committee.

Action: Build an e-mail list of shorebird researchers in U.S. that will help re-engage scientists in Plan activities by 15 May 2004 and distribute information on the new research group (Andres and Brown).

Education and Outreach

Shorebird Sister Schools Program

Sandy Spakoff has taken the position as the new Shorebird Sister School Program (SSSP) Coordinator for the Division of Education Outreach at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Sandy comes to NCTC from the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex where she held the position of Chief of Visitor Services for the past three years. She can be reached at sssp@fws.gov or through the SSSP website <<http://sssp.fws.gov>>.

The Shorebird Sister Schools Program is sponsoring an electronic field trip along the Pacific Flyway. The launch was 12 April 12, but information will be available on the web until the end of August (<<http://www.eFieldTrips.org/shorebirds>>). An "Ask the Experts" session will be held on 27–28 April 2004.

Wetland Link International

At the Waterbirds Around the World Conference, Brad Andres discussed the following program with its coordinator, Malcolm Whitehead. Wetland Link International (WLI - pronounced wellie) programme is a global network of wetland education centres. The network defines a wetland education centre as, "any place where there is interaction between people and wildlife and where CEPA activity (communications, education and public awareness) occurs in support of wetland conservation aims". Thus the WLI network embraces wetland nature reserves with a wide range of visitor facilities, environmental education centres, field study centres, zoological and botanical gardens, many interactive natural history museums and a wide variety of community site-based projects and programmes (see <<http://www.wli.org.uk>>).

WLI is open to any organisation, group or individual who is planning, designing or operating a place or places where there is interaction between people and wetlands, especially wetland life, with an educational and/or interpretative objective. Members may be government or non-government, professional or amateur, paid or voluntary. E-communications will be the mainspring of the network so participation will occur at many levels, beginning with simple membership of a list-serve and e-discussion group. The number of secondary audiences will include policy makers, potential funders and wider environmental professionals beyond education/interpretation etc.

The WLI network is endorsed by the Ramsar Convention on wetlands and coordinated by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), the premier UK-based international wetland conservation charity.

Education and Outreach Working Group Chair

We do not yet have a chair for the Education and Outreach Working Group. Please send any nominations to the National Coordinator.

Past Action: Nominate and approve an Outreach and Education Working Group Chair by 31 July 2004.

Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network

Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) Director Charles Duncan has completed the five-year strategic plan for the program. Stephen Brown presented the strategy and the Council discussed their role and accepted the responsibility for serving as the WHSRN-U.S. Council. A specific U.S. work plan will need to be developed, in cooperation with the emerging WHSRN hemispheric council and with the input of all U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council members. Principal among the tasks associated with a U.S. WHSRN program will be the solicitation and review of site nominations.

Action: Draft letter, under Chair or Vice-Chair signature, to Council members and regional coordinators asking them to encourage submission of sites nominations (Andres).

Action: Develop a brief, specific work plan for the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council as implemented of WHSRN-US by 31 August 2004. Develop a process for reviewing and recommending site nominations to the Hemispheric Council (Hickey, Duncan).

Action: Suggest a schedule that minimize duplicity and overlap between WHSRN and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council meetings 31 July 2004 (Hickey, Duncan).

Areas and Species of Importance

North American Wetlands Conservation Act Technical Question #3

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) staff is considering changes to technical question #3 which would award points if a proposed project fell with a priority shorebird (and other bird) area. In response to this request, Brad Andres, with the help of Jim Johnson (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) provided the NAWCA staff with an draft map that depicted WHSRN sites of regional, international, or hemispheric importance. These sites were later clustered in polygons. Clearly, this approach is not likely sufficient to address priority habitat needs of shorebirds. The Council discussed the need to include breeding range information and to further evaluate the proposed areas. Also discussed with the need to provide more specific information on which habitats are most valuable to shorebirds within these large geographic areas. A map could be created that would code the seasonality of use (breeding, migration/ wintering, both). Besides providing information to NAWCA identification of priority regions could also be useful to other land protection partners.

Action: Revise map and distribute to Council members for comments by 31 August 2004. Map should include polygons for stop-over, wintering, and breeding regions (Andres, Jones).

Action: Within each of the identified areas, develop seasonal habitat needs for priority and other species suites (Andres, regional coordinators).

Priority Species

The Council also discussed the need to update or correct shorebird population sizes and to present high priority species in a way that better illustrates their conservation needs. Brian McCaffery has reviewed many scores and sizes for Alaska. Updating this information would be helpful for State plans, Joint Ventures, and other conservation endeavors. Grouping of high priority species would be reviewed by the committee who worked on the initial species assessment scheme for the Shorebird Plan.

Action: Review, update, or correct population sizes of all shorebird taxa by 31 August 2004 (Andres, McCaffery).

Action: Develop groupings of high priority species that reflect their conservation needs by 31 August 2004 (Andres, Species Assessment Committee).

Pacific Coast Snowy Plover Status

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced on 22 March 2004 that it will conduct an in-depth look at the status of the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover. The study — known as a ““12-month status review”” — will examine whether the population of western snowy plovers that breeds in coastal areas in California, Oregon and Washington should retain its current classification as a threatened species.

To ensure that the status review is comprehensive and based on the best available science, the Service is opening a 60-day public-comment period to solicit information and data regarding the species. Comments, material, information, or questions concerning this petition and finding should be sent to the Field Supervisor, Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2800 Cottage Way, Sacramento, California 95825-1846. Comments and information should be submitted by **5 p.m. Thursday, May 20, 2004.**

The Federal Register notice can be found at:

<http://frwebgate3.access.gpo.gov/cgi_bin/waisgate.cgi?WAISdocID=48739020244+2+0+0&W AISaction=retrieve>, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service news release and other information at: <http://news.fws.gov/newsreleases/r1/3A64D9E5_690B_42E7_820309F5CC838D47.html>

Action: Council to decide if they should send comments on finding by 7 May 2004.

Bar-tailed Godwit Conservation in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway

Brian McCaffery briefed the Council on concerns about the conservation status of the *baueri* population of bar-tailed godwits. Recent fall surveys in both Alaska and New Zealand suggest that godwit productivity has been very low over the last half-decade. Juveniles (i.e., young of the year) have comprised $\leq 3\%$ of the fall flocks staging along the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta coastline since 1999. Similarly, anecdotal reports from the non-breeding grounds in New Zealand indicate that juveniles comprise only 1-2% of the flocks there in late fall and early winter. Second, the limited data available suggest that the average clutch size of godwits breeding on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta may have declined by 20% between the early and late 20th century. Another concern is that godwits are, or soon may be, harvested throughout their annual range. Up to a few thousand are harvested in late summer and fall in western Alaska in August and September, and farther south a harvest of similar magnitude occurs in China in the spring. In addition to ongoing harvests during the migratory period, there is the possibility of increased harvest during the non-breeding season when the godwits spend the austral summer in New Zealand. The indigenous Maori, who have a long and rich history of respect for, and use of, godwits in their native culture, have recently petitioned their government to authorize a legal hunt of godwits in their country.

Given that 1) neither the magnitude nor significance of ongoing and pending harvest on bar-tailed godwits is well-known, 2) extant data from which to make inferences about the significance of those impacts is extremely limited, 3) co-management boards and/or government agencies at both ends of the flyway have recently been presented with proposals for altering current harvest management policies, and 4) such decisions should not be made in a biogeographical or sociopolitical vacuum, it is important that concerned stakeholders immediately begin planning for and coordinating the development of a flyway-wide management plan for bar-tailed godwits. The Alaska Shorebird Group is working to implement the proposal drafted by Brian McCaffery.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Strategic Plan

“A Blueprint for the Future of Migratory Birds, Migratory Bird Program Strategic Plan 2004–2014” is available on the Internet at: <<http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/mbstratplan/MBStratPlanTOC.htm>>. Contact Brad Andres for a printed copy if needed.

Regional Implementation

Despite travel restrictions and generally low budgets, regional groups continue to make progress toward shorebird plan implementation. Groups in the Intermountain West and Northern Pacific Coast have met recently, and the Southern Pacific and Alaska have revised their regional plans. The Central Hardwoods BCR have begun their planning for birds that includes setting objectives for passage shorebirds. A brief report on regional shorebird plan activities will be prepared and distributed.

Action: Regional contacts should provide a brief report to the National Coordinator by 15 May 2004 on activities of the regional shorebird working groups over the last year relative to regional plan goals and objectives (regional coordinators, Andres).

Joint Venture Implementation Plans

As Joint Ventures move towards developing conservation strategies for all birds, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Committee has decided that they will focus only on the technical review of JV implementation plans with respect to waterfowl. Therefore, review regarding implementation of other waterbird objectives is needed. The Council suggested that the author of the regional plan, one other Council member, and the national coordinator review the implementation plan and prepare comments to the Joint Venture. Equally important is increasing, or continuing, to promote shorebird conservation needs within the Joint Ventures. It was suggested that a letter be sent to each Joint Venture management board offering to make a presentation on the status of the Shorebird Plan.

Action: Draft a letter to the Joint Venture management boards offering to make a presentation at an upcoming board meeting on current activities of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan by 1 July 2004 (Andres, Hickey).

International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) is organizing a committee to draft recommendations on how to increase wildlife benefits in Farm Bill legislation and implementation. The Shorebird Plan has been invited to participate on this committee, which is being chaired by Ray Evans of (formerly) Missouri. Debbie Hahn will provide the National Coordinator with further details when available. There was some discussion about how to raise the profile of the Bird Conservation Plans within state fish and wildlife agencies, particularly given the rapid turn-around in state directors. The approach to Joint Venture management boards described above was suggested. There was also some discussion on how to meld the Shorebird Plan activities better with the IAFWA waterbird/shorebird working group without duplicating efforts or actions.

North American Bird Conservation Initiative and Shorebird Funding

The Council decided that, at this time, no further revisions are needed to the Shorebird Plan or PRISM funding needs documents. Ellie Cohen (PRBO Conservation Science) is participating in the Bird Funding Coalition that is loosely associated with the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) and will keep the Council informed of their efforts. The Bird Funding Coalition is beginning to take a harder look at science support needs of the initiatives. Notes on the last U.S. NABCI committee meeting were previously distributed.

Past Action: Decide who should represent the Council if Ellie Cohen can not attend a U.S. NABCI Committee meeting by 30 June 2004 (Hickey).

Action: Update list of general shorebird funding opportunities and post on Shorebird Plan website by 31 May 2004 (Andres)

Mexico

Jack Capp reported that the final version of the Mexican Shorebird Conservation Plan will likely be submitted to Mexico's Wildlife General Director sometime in April. Eduardo Carrera provided an update to various meetings at the March 2004 North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference.

Don Paul, through the Intermountain West Joint Venture, continues to build linkages between the Great Salt Lake, Utah, and Marismas Nacionales, Nayarit, Mexico. Utah folks attended a Nayarit shorebird festival in January 2004, and Mexican Shorebird Sister Schools Program educators will be visiting the Great Salt Lake Bird Festival in May 2004.

National Coordinator Relocation

Brad Andres will be moving to Lakewood, Colorado, in mid-June 2004. He will remain in his current position as National Coordinator of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. His contact information will be distributed by e-mail after the move. The e-mail address will remain the same.

National Coordinator Work Plan

The National Coordinator's time allocated to achieve specific actions, over the next six months, is noted below (based on 863 available hours for the six months between 1 April and 30 September).

General communication, plan administration, proposal/manuscript review – 20%; 173 hours.

Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring; Adaptive Resource Management approaches for non-game birds – 30%; 259 hours.

Maintain shorebird management listserve; technical assistance for Shorebird Sister Schools Program; develop habitat management outreach materials – 15%; 129 hours.

Assist development of shorebird population and habitat objectives – 25%; 216 hours.

Facilitate Delaware Bay Shorebird Technical Committee – 10%; 86 hours.

Next Council Meeting

The Council briefly discussed the format of meetings and tentatively suggested that the Council meet once a year for a longer period of time away from the normal meeting venues and once for a briefer period associated with a major wildlife meeting. Perhaps meetings of the WHSRN at either IAFWA or the North American would morph into a WHSRN-US meeting?

Action: Decide on Council meeting venue, if any, for fall/early winter 2004 by 15 July 2004 (Andres, Council).

Workshop and Meeting Participants

Adrian Farmer, U.S. Geological Survey
Brad Andres, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bob Russell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Brian McCaffery, Yukon Delta NWR
Brian Sullivan, Playa Lakes Joint Venture
Bruce Peterjohn, U.S. Geological Survey
Catherine Hickey, Point Reyes Bird Observatory
David Klute, Colorado Division of Wildlife
David Mehlman, The Nature Conservancy
Garry Donaldson, Canadian Wildlife Service
Jack Capp, USDA Forest Service
John Cecil, National Audubon Society
Jon Bart, U.S. Geological Survey
Scott Johnston, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Stephanie Jones, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Stephen Brown, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences
Susan Skagen, U.S. Geological Survey
Suzanne Fellows, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Prepared by Brad Andres, 21 April 2004

Minutes of Council meetings, Shorebird Plan documents, and other Shorebird Plan information is posted at <<http://shorebirdplan.fws.gov>>. For hard copies of any documents, or for general questions, contact: Brad A. Andres, National Coordinator, U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, Division of Migratory Bird Management, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., MBSP 4107, Arlington, VA, 22203, USA; 703/358-1828 (phone); 2217 (fax); Brad_Andres@fws.gov (e-mail).